The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listing, of claims in the application:

## LISTING OF CLAIMS

Claim 1. (currently amended) A spreader bar apparatus comprising:

an elongate central member having a hollow interior;

a pair of elongate end members, each elongate end member being partially disposed within the hollow interior so that a first portion of the elongate end member is disposed within the hollow interior and a second portion of the elongate end member is external to the hollow interior, the second portion of each elongate end member extending to a distal end; and

a pair of sling ~~guides~~ guide members, each sling guide member being attached to the distal end of a corresponding elongate end member,

wherein each sling guide member comprises a pair of guide plates arranged in a generally vertical orientation so as to contain a sling line therebetween; and

a generally smooth and downwardly sloping surface between the guide plates for contacting the sling line during a lifting operation.

Claim 2. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the first portion of each elongate end member has an end that is located within the hollow interior and wherein the ends of the elongate end members located in the hollow interior abut one another so as to cause compressive forces to be translated throughout the spreader bar apparatus.

Claim 3. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the elongate central member and is substantially tubular.

Claim 4. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 3 wherein each elongate end member is substantially tubular.

Claim 5. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the elongate end members are removably secured with the hollow interior of the elongate central member.

Claim 6. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 1 further comprising a locking system to prevent the elongate end members from being dislodged from the hollow interior.

Claim 7. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 6 further wherein the locking system comprises:

a plurality of pairs of diametrically positioned openings in the elongate central member;

a plurality of pairs of diametrically positioned openings in each elongate end member, each pair of diametrically positioned openings in each elongate end member being

substantially aligned with a corresponding pair of diametrically positioned openings in the elongate central member; and

a plurality of pin members, each pin members being disposed through a corresponding pair of diametrically positioned openings in the elongate central member and a corresponding pair of diametrical positioned openings in one of the elongate end members.

Claim 8. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 7 wherein each pin member has a distal end that is exposed when the pin member is disposed through the diametrically positioned openings of the elongate central member and elongate end members, the locking system further comprises a locking member that is fastened to the exposed distal end of each plurality of pin members to prevent each pin member from becoming dislodged from the diametrically positioned openings of the elongate central member and elongate end members.

Claim 9. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 8 wherein the locking system further comprises a tie that has one portion attached to the elongate central member, another portion attached to a corresponding pin member, and a another portion attached to a corresponding locking member.

Claim 10. (canceled)

Claim 11. (currently amended) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim ~~10~~ 1 wherein each sling guide member further comprises a pin member secured to the guide plates to maintain a sling line between the guide plates.

Claim 12. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 11 wherein each sling guide member further comprises a locking pin member secured to the pin member to prevent the pin member from being dislodged from the guide plates.

Claim 13. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 12 wherein each sling guide member further comprises a tie attached to the pin member, the locking member and one of the guide plates to prevent the pin member and the locking member from being separated from the spreader bar apparatus.

Claim 14. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the elongate central member and the elongate end members are fabricated from metal.

Claim 15. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 14 wherein the elongate central member and the elongate end members are fabricated from aluminum.

Claim 16. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 14 wherein the elongate central member and the elongate end members are fabricated from steel.

Claim 17. (currently amended) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 16 further including a non-corrosive coating ~~one~~ on the steel.

Claim 18. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the elongate central member and the elongate end members are fabricated from composite materials.

Claim 19. (currently amended) A spreader bar apparatus comprising:

an substantially tubular elongate central member having a hollow interior;

a pair of tubular elongate end members, each elongate end member being partially and removably disposed within the hollow interior so that a first portion of the elongate end member is disposed within the hollow interior and a second portion of the elongate end member is external to the hollow interior, the second portion of each elongate end member extends to a distal end; and

a pair of sling guides, each sling guide being attached to the distal end of a corresponding elongate end member; and

wherein the first portion of each elongate end member has an end that is located within the hollow interior of the elongate central member and wherein the ends of the elongate end member located in the hollow interior abut one another to cause

a compressive force applied to the sling guides to be translated throughout the elongate central member and the elongate end members; and

wherein each sling guide comprises a pair of guide plates arranged in a generally vertical orientation so as to contain a sling line therebetween; and

a generally smooth and downwardly sloping surface between the guide plates for contacting the sling line during a lifting operation.

Claim 20. (original) The spreader bar apparatus according to claim 19 further comprising means for securing the elongate end members to the elongate central member.

Claim 21. (canceled)